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Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: high-level dialogue on strengthening international economic cooperation for development through partnership

Renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international economic cooperation for development through partnership

Report of the Secretary-General**

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I. Introduction

1. The present report provides information on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 54/213 of 22 December 1999 on the renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international economic cooperation for development through partnership.

2. In that resolution, the General Assembly decided that the theme of the second high-level dialogue would be: "Responding to globalization: facilitating the integration of developing countries into the world economy in the twenty-first century". The Assembly also decided to defer the holding of the second high-level dialogue to its fifty-sixth session, without changing the biannual nature of the high-level dialogue. The first high-level dialogue of the Assembly was held on 17 and 18 September 1998 on the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their policy implications (see resolution 53/181).

3. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 54/213, the General Assembly requested the President of the Assembly to begin consultations with Member States so as to arrive at an early decision on the date, modalities, nature of the outcome and focus of the discussions of the second high-level dialogue, taking into account past experience and the contributions to be provided by Member States as well as regional institutions and the United Nations system. It commended the continuing use of interactive panel discussions, including with the participation of non-governmental actors, to facilitate the dialogue.

4. In paragraph 5, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in close cooperation with Governments, all relevant parts of the United Nations system, relevant organizations and other development agencies, to make initial preparations for the dialogue, while also taking into account the results of major United Nations conferences and summits.

II. Progress in implementation of resolution 54/213

A. Intergovernmental consultations

5. At the request and on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, the Chairperson of the Second Committee undertook, on 9 June 2000, consultations with Member States on the date, modalities, nature of the outcome and focus of the discussions of the second high-level dialogue, and conveyed the results thereon to the President (A/54/952). During the consultations, account was taken of the experience of the first high-level dialogue, held in September 1998, as well as the recent experience of preparing and organizing high-level events, such as the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, the Millennium Assembly and other events. The outcome of the consultations is summarized below.

1. Date for the second high-level dialogue

6. The consultations supported the convening of the two-day dialogue immediately before the commencement of the general debate at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

2. Modalities for the second high-level dialogue

7. It was recommended to use an approach combining plenary meetings, ministerial round tables and informal panels in order to stimulate high-level interest and ensure interactive dialogue. It was felt that such a format would allow delegations to make brief formal statements at the plenary meetings, and at the same time facilitate productive interactive discussions, as well as an infusion of views and analyses from non-governmental panellists. Ministerial round tables would be open for members of delegations to attend.

3. Outcome of the second high-level dialogue

8. Given the time constraints of a two-day event, it was decided during the consultations that a President's summary, to be presented at the closure of the event, would be the most appropriate outcome. This summary could, at a later stage, be expanded to include other material, for example summaries of ministerial round tables and informal panels, and any concluding observations the President might wish to present. It was also suggested that the President might wish to present the overall summary as his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

4. Focus of the second high-level dialogue

9. During the consultations, it was agreed that within the overall theme of the dialogue agreed upon in resolution 54/213, the focus of the discussions should

be on two sub-themes, taking into account the deliberations of the Millennium Summit, the high-level segments of the Economic and Social Council in 2000 and 2001, the financing for development process and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The two sub-themes are:

(a) Promoting the integration of developing countries into the world economy and generating new public and private financial resources to complement development efforts;

(b) Enhancing the integration of developing countries in the emerging global information network, facilitating access for developing countries to information and communication technology.

B. Involvement of the United Nations system

10. As requested in resolution 54/213, preparations for the dialogue will be undertaken by the Secretary-General, in close cooperation with Governments, with all relevant parts of the United Nations system, relevant organizations and other development agencies.

11. The outcome of the consultations convened by the Chairperson of the Second Committee in June 2000 were conveyed to the executive heads of the entities of the United Nations system, inviting their views thereon. At the same time, executive heads were invited to contribute to the preparations leading up to the high-level event in 2001.

12. Several entities of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions and international financial institutions, have already expressed their support for the approach agreed to in the consultations held by the Chairperson of the Second Committee. They indicated their readiness to cooperate fully with the Secretary-General in the preparations for the second high-level dialogue.

13. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), in its capacity as current coordinator of the regional commissions, emphasized the readiness of the commissions to play an active part in the dialogue, preferably in the form of a round table with the five Executive Secretaries and the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), similar to the one organized on information and communication technologies within the framework of the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in July 2000. Such a panel discussion would relate to the first sub-theme.

14. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund noted that the theme of the dialogue provided scope for taking into account the results of other initiatives preceding it, such as the financing for development process, and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The International Civil Aviation Organization stressed the value of the international civil aviation system in promoting the integration of developing countries into the world economy, and emphasized the critical importance of development financing for aviation projects. The World Food Programme suggested that the situation of the poor should play a central role in the debate leading up to the high-level dialogue.

15. In drawing attention to several facets that should be taken into account within the overall theme, the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention stressed the importance of ensuring access of developing countries to information technology in the interest of good governance. In the view of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, globalization and the rapid advance in communication technologies had greatly facilitated and "globalized" a variety of criminal activities. Transnational organized crime groups had been among the first to make use of the relaxation of border controls, information technology and electronic banking. There had been a surge in trafficking in human beings, firearms and drugs, as well as economic crime and cyber-crime. In order to counter those trends, it was essential that countries had access to an equivalent level of technology, and, at the global level, information-sharing in those areas. It was in the interest of the international community to ensure that developing countries were in a position to track and counter criminal activities. The development of good governance was also imperative in order to reduce the risk of corrupt and fraudulent practices undermining efforts in that direction.

16. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) agreed with the focus of the sub-themes, considering them to be of particular importance to African countries. At the same time, ECA suggested that they were too broad in their current state, thus not allowing discussions to be sufficiently focused. Accordingly,

ECA suggested that the sub-themes be broken down along the following lines and areas of focus:

(a) Promoting the integration of developing countries into the world economy:

(i) Effecting transformation in developing countries for effective integration in the global economy;

(ii) The challenges of raising productivity and international competitiveness of developing countries;

(iii) The difficulties of achieving diversification by developing countries in a globalizing world economy;

(iv) The challenges of the multilateral trading system to developing countries in the framework of the World Trade Organization rules;

(b) Generating new public and private financing resources to complement development efforts:

(i) The challenges of mobilizing domestic savings in poor developing countries;

(ii) The role of institutions in resource mobilization;

(iii) The role of pension funds in resource mobilization;

(c) Enhancing the integration of developing countries in the emerging global information network:

(i) Challenges to address strategically opportunities presented by the transition of the global economy to one based on knowledge and information;

(ii) The role of national planning and implementation process through national information and communication infrastructure plans designed in conjunction with regional and global frameworks;

(iii) Challenges in defining policies that address basic needs and ensure an environment that is conducive to create the necessary conditions;

(d) Facilitating access to information and communication technology for developing countries:

(i) Challenges facing African countries in achieving a culture of democratized access to the information society;

(ii) Strategies for harnessing information and communication technologies in support of development initiatives with particular emphasis on access for rural communities;

(iii) Challenges of promoting affordable universal access and service in information and communication technologies for disadvantaged communities to facilitate development, empowerment and economic growth;

(iv) The role of telecentres to serve as effective vehicles for enhancing the knowledge, education and learning opportunities for communities in emerging economies.

17. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), financial resources and information technology to assist developing countries needed to target, inter alia, their capacity to engage in trade and to harmonize regulatory frameworks relating to areas of prime importance to their economies, as well as to link those means with relevant content. Agriculture was a key sector of the economy of developing countries and the single most important sector in that of least developed countries. Their integration into the world economy at least over the medium term would relate closely to this sector through poverty alleviation strategies, trade negotiation and the harmonization of regulatory frameworks governing relevant areas.

18. Several entities of the United Nations system provided substantive inputs and background material relevant to the theme of the dialogue. UNCTAD, for example, pointed to information contained in its trade and development reports that could form its contribution to the preparations. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) had dealt with the two sub-themes at its fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth sessions in 1999 and 2000, respectively, and ESCAP had provided the background materials and outcomes of those discussions. FAO provided information about its activities and other specific inputs relevant to the theme of the dialogue. Those and further contributions from the United Nations system, as well as their suggestions on the format for, and participation in the dialogue, will be reflected in the ongoing preparations.

C. Related United Nations events and processes

19. In resolution 54/213, the General Assembly emphasized that preparations for the dialogue should take into account the results of major United Nations conferences and summits. The consultations also drew attention to the relevance of the deliberations of the Millennium Summit, the high-level segments of the Economic and Social Council of 2000 and 2001, the financing for development process and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

20. In this regard, and in addition to the outcomes of the recently completed five-year review processes of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Social Development, attention is drawn to the Ministerial Declaration on development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century, adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 7 July 2000; the role of information technologies in the context of a knowledge-based global economy. In its resolution 2000/29 of 28 July 2000, the Council also endorsed the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics to establish an information and communications technologies task force with the objectives of providing overall leadership to the United Nations role in helping to formulate strategies for the development of information and communication technologies and putting those technologies at the service of development. The Council decided to consider the theme for its high-level segment of 2001 at a resumed session.

21. The first session of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries was held in New York from 24 to 28 July. It included a series of inter-active debates, and considered the substantive and organizational aspects of the preparatory process for the Conference and the Conference itself. It endorsed the design and structure of the Conference, and on the process for the preparation of a draft new programme of action. The second session of the Preparatory Committee is scheduled to take place in the first week of April 2001. The Conference itself will take place from 14 to 20 May 2001 on the premises of the European Parliament in Brussels, hosted by the European Union. The state of preparations for the Conference is before the Assembly in document A/55/222.

22. The Preparatory Committee for the High-level International Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development adopted, in June 2000, a substantive preliminary agenda for the financing for development process (A/AC.257/L.2/Rev.1), and agreed on a tentative schedule for its second and third sessions, to be convened in February and May 2001, respectively. Regional consultations on financing for development are taking place between August and December 2000 (ESCAP: at Jakarta, from 2 to 5 August 2000; ECLAC: in Colombia on 9 and 10 November; ECA: at Addis Ababa from 21 to 23 November; and ECE: at Geneva on 6 and 7 December).

III. Next steps

23. In the light of the results of the consultations, and of the initial preparations already undertaken by the Secretary-General and the United Nations system, the General Assembly, at its fifty-fifth session, may wish to take the following actions:

(a) Endorse the decisions of the intergovernmental consultations concerning the date, modalities, nature of the outcome and focus of the discussions of the second high-level dialogue;

(b) Reiterate the overall theme chosen at its fifty-fourth session, and endorse the two sub-themes proposed by the intergovernmental consultation;

(c) Request the President of the General Assembly to continue preparations for the second high-level dialogue in close collaboration with Member States, and taking into account past experience with the first high-level dialogue, as well as recent experience of preparing and organizing high-level events;

(d) Request the Secretary-General, in close cooperation with Governments, all relevant parts of the United Nations system, and other relevant stakeholders, to prepare the second high-level dialogue, taking into account resolution 54/213, the outcome of the consultations held by the Chairperson of the Second Committee, as well as any further guidance provided by Member States as the outcome of the consideration of the relevant item by the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.